

Report

San Antonio Missions National Historic Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

The San Antonio Missions National Historic Park (NHP), located in San Antonio, Texas, was founded in 1978. The chain of missions established along the San Antonio River in the 18th century is a reminder of one of Spain's most successful attempts to extend its domination northward from New Spain (present-day Mexico). Collectively they are the largest concentration of Catholic missions in North America. Today, this NHP consists of six distinct properties:

- **The Alamo** – Mission San Antonio de Valero, popularly known as the Alamo, was the earliest of the chain of San Antonio missions established along the San Antonio River in 1718. Today it is recognized as “The Cradle of Texas Liberty,” a symbol of freedom and independence throughout the world. This mission was the site of an infamous battle that ended on March 6, 1836, which signified Texas’ desire for freedom. A State Historic Site, the Alamo has been under the care of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas since 1905.
- **Mission Concepción** – The mission of Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción was built in 1731 and is the nation’s oldest unrestored stone church. The church, sacristy and convent buildings are still standing and look essentially as they did in mid-1700s, when it served as the mission’s center of religious activity.
- **Mission San José** – In 1720 Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús founded what became known as the Texas missions, San José y San Miguel de Aguayo. Viewed as a model of mission organization, San José was a major social center. The unique architecture of its church and the richness of its fields and pastures led visitors to comment on its beauty.
- **Mission San Juan** – Originally founded as San José de los Nazonis in 1716 in eastern Texas, Mission San Juan was transferred in 1731 to its present location. In 1756, the stone church, a friary, and granary were completed. A larger church was begun, but was abandoned when half completed, the result of population decline.
- **Mission Espada** – Originally established as San Francisco de los Tejas in 1690, the oldest of the East Texas missions was moved to the San Antonio River in 1731 and renamed San Francisco de la Espada. The southernmost of the San Antonio missions, Espada is known for its unique archway and a stone irrigation aqueduct nearby.
- **The Mission Ranches** – Mission Espada’s Rancho de las Cabras (Ranch of Goats) is located southwest of Floresville, Texas. At this site, free-roaming sheep, goats, and

cattle were sold or traded to presidios and civil settlements as far south and west as Coahuila (in present-day Mexico) and east to Louisiana. These irrigated farmlands were the key to the Missions' efforts of achieving self sufficiency. This site is preserved to celebrate the beginning of the ranching industry in Texas and the Southwest.

The San Antonio Missions NHP consists of the six non-contiguous destination sites described above, totaling nearly 835 acres (see Figure 1). In 1978, Congress pledged federal support for this nationally significant resource by establishing the San Antonio Missions NHP. By cooperative agreement with the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the mission churches remain active centers of worship. The NPS also has cooperative agreements with the city of San Antonio, the county of Bexar, the state of Texas, and the San Antonio Conservation Society.

The San Antonio Missions is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. throughout the year. The Park is closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Visitation to the Park is relatively consistent February through November. The Park experiences a slight drop in visitation during December and January. Last year's visitation was 1,118,905. There has been a 76 percent increase in visitation over the last five years.

Transportation-related projects currently being implemented at the Park include the Mission Trails Project as well as the construction of accessible walkways at Mission San Jose and Mission Espada. The Mission Trails project, presently under construction, includes a hike and bike trail, and driving route from the Alamo in the heart of San Antonio's business district to Espada, the southernmost mission site in the Park. Some sections of the trail are presently open and parallel the San Antonio River.

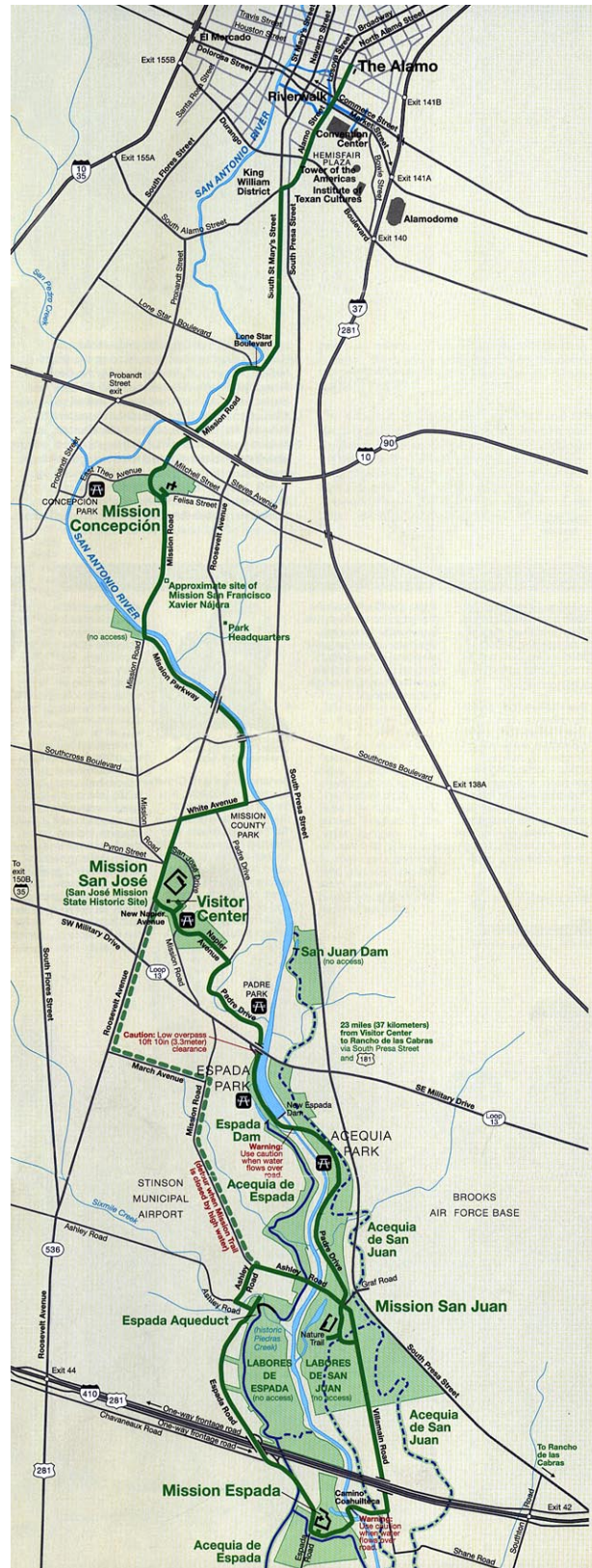
The NPS provides an average of 25 parking spaces at each of the above mentioned destination locations. Each of these projects is consistent with the goals outlined in the Park's General Management Plan (GMP) completed in 1983. Revisions to this plan are expected in the near future.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The majority of visitors access the various attractions within the Park by private vehicle. As mentioned above, a roadway, which is considered as part of the Mission Trail, connects each mission site and its accompanying attractions. A pedestrian and bicycle trail connecting each site in the Park is presently under construction. Some sections of the trail are presently open and parallel the San Antonio River. When completed, this hike and bike trail will fully link downtown San Antonio with each of the Park's major attractions.

Bus and shuttle service within the Park is limited to a number of privately owned companies. The fees for these services range from \$6.00 to \$8.00 per ticket. A city bus route, which travels north and south on Roosevelt Avenue, connects downtown San Antonio and a stop a few blocks away from the Visitor Center and Mission San Jose.

Figure 1. San Antonio Missions National Historic Park



■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Additional Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs identified include:

- Additional funding to complete the Missions Trails Project. To date, \$27,000,000 of the \$32,000,000 allotted for this project has been spent. Significant components of the project remain incomplete.
- Provide bus service to the two southernmost sites, Mission San Juan and Mission Espada and the surrounding communities. The VIA Metropolitan Transit Route 42 presently stops at Roosevelt and New Napier and is considered within walking distance of the Park Visitor Center and Mission San Jose. Additional stops could be added near Mission San Juan and Mission Espada, thus providing full service to each of the Park's attractions. These additional stops would also serve the adjacent residential communities.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The completion the Mission Trails Project and added bus service to locations near each of the Park's mission sites is considered necessary to meet visitor interpretive goals, provide a complete and pleasant visitor experience and ensure that all people have equal access to each Park attraction. The Missions Trails Project, when complete, will allow pedestrians and bicyclists to travel from the Alamo in downtown San Antonio to the southernmost site, Mission Espada. Presently, this access is only available for those in private vehicles. As mentioned above, such services, if provided by VIA Metropolitan Transit, could equally serve the adjacent residential areas near Mission San Juan and Mission Espada.

Additional services proposed would have the following benefits:

- Completion of the Missions Trail Project will provide a full network of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities throughout the Park.
- Additional bus services to the southernmost sites in the Park will provide a key link for tourists and residents alike traveling to and from downtown San Antonio. This would enable more visitors to be served and improve visitor convenience.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

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■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Stephen Whiteshell, San Antonio Missions. Telephone Conversation. November 17, 1999